181 that she is a girl, that one day she will be a man's plaything, an
831 object for his pleasure. The child would leave smiling and replace
her three fingers of rag even as she walked away. At dinner time a
[482] big girl would come carrying the gourd of tô, or sorghum gruel, on
her head; and on the palm of her right hand, at shoulder height, the
platter of dried fish sauce. She would be greeted from as far away
as she could be seen and asked for a report on her whole body, and
indeed there would be no stopping at "how are your feet" nor even at
"how are your breasts." And the girl would answer all these vile questions
without getting excited, and when a well-washed hand, ready to
be used as a spoon, embraced her or lifted her breasts, she was not
shocked; only the opposite would surprise her.

887 Here and there in the village a giant tree stretches its branches
538 afar, and the old men, lovers of endless palaver, enjoy themselves
521 under its shade. They go there from the early morning to weave cloth,
make mats, tan hides, scour goats' horns intended for powerful
amulets, etc., and often even /159/ just for the purpose of spending
the hours dozing. And in the midst of all these gray, or at least
graying beards, swarms a world of children. Among the old men
there are good storytellers /conteur/, who excel in stories of hunting
and war that throb with interest -- but why, alas, must they always
graft on some salacious incident? Their mouths are full chiefly with
[831] stories of adultery and fornication. They will not spare you a single
detail, and they will readily go back to the very beginning so as to
lack no precision whatever. And the moral of these stories can be
reduced to this: "There is nothing in this world comparable to the
pleasures of the flesh; let us enjoy marriage and never pass up a chance
to obtain this satisfaction."

521 If the old men are this lewd, is it surprising to hear the young
831 men describe the ugliness of their bestial evenings while they make
864 mats, stretch the hides of drums, or sew a blouse, a cap, or trousers
for themselves in the b'lon, or entry hut? They talk constantly of their
soungouwou, and this term, which should simply mean an unmarried
girl, means any woman, married or not, who gives herself to the
first comer.

Without any shame they talk and chat about all these vile acts
before their little brothers, before children ten and twelve years old,

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887 Moment by moment the old women come closer and the word "Kouyo ê, Kouyo ê" resounds louder and louder. But now they come out, and their bodies move as if they were made of rings, so closely do they imitate a worm surprised by a ray of sunshine who is hastily returning to its nest in the ground. With their pointed chins, wrinkled skins, and toothless jaws, they look like real savages as they furiously scrape two iron rods; on their bald heads they wear dirty towels, the filthy appurtenances of sorceresses, wound without skill or taste. With spear in hand the young citizens appear in full trousers; they wear caps with double points or loud-colored turbans with long fringes, and their bodies disappear under loose blouses still all perfumed with the musty smell of the bottom of a storage bin, all stiff and shiny under a paste of starch. They leap and shout, they brandish their arms, assume the look of warriors, and especially assume such a look of conceit that one's laughter is unloosed.

[145] After the boys come the girls, fanning their "alms purses" all decorated with cowrie shells; these are platters braided of fine, pliable grass, doubtless those onto which the bloody remnants were placed on the morning of the soli si, or arms' vigil. They come forward stiffly,
[301] and glide rather than walk over the ground, for their feet are weighed down by small chains and iron rings, and can hardly be lifted. Gold or copper crescents pull down the septum of their noses, a handful of striped periwinkle shells hangs from the lobe of each ear, several coral necklaces encircle their heads, and everywhere, chiefly around their necks, are pieces of amber interspersed by grigris and beads of every size and shade. Bambara of the nourmou, or blacksmith caste,
881 the Marka turned Bambara, and every Bambara girl /196/ of more or
302 less mixed stock whose head was not shaved at the da woro, or festival of the sixth day, has their hair braided, and on top of the crest which ends in two small braids along each ear, there is an odd little bundle, a handful of hair. This is in memory of the eighth day after the girl's birth, the day when she was given her name, and what she is wearing is nothing less than what the Bambara call "the hair of the womb" (1). If this has been lost, as is usually the case, the

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erroneous, for the Bambara despises this breed and would never entrust one with such a delicate mission. The Bambara dreads the storyteller in his private festivals. How many times they say as they invite us: "We came ourselves to invite you so that the news may not reach the ears of the storytellers." The to-n-tigi, head of the association of the fla-n-to, plays no important role in the marriage of a to-n-dé, or member. The to-n-déou, members of the association of the fla-n-to, are invited and enjoy themselves at the wedding of a fellow te-n-de, and that is all. Mr. Barbier Louis /sic/ makes a mistake; see page 527, Dec. 16, 1907, of the review La Quinzaine.

584 latter receives four kola nuts wrapped in green leaves and tied again and again so that they will not wither, and, spear in hand and his inseparable goatskin, or foroko, well fastened to his shoulder, he starts on his way, proud to be assigned such a pleasant mission and happy and pleased to be the fourouboloma tigi, guardian of the wedding gifts (2).

2. Fourouboloma, "engagement gift"; tigi, "master."

584 At the end of his journey, on the public square, he extends a ●887 very friendly greeting to the old men who there devote themselves to 576 laziness in the shade of a great tree with the apathy of lizards; he gives them all generously of the snuff that every stranger must offer, and if he has no friend or acquaintance in the village, he chooses from among them a man of good will who will introduce him to the family and smooth the way for him. When this man is found, he goes

584 there without further delay and makes his request, which the man who
887 introduced him repeats word by word and sentence by sentence.

584 The father of the girl ponders a moment, and if the suit pleases him he answers in a word: "A gnéna, that's good." The little package of four kola nuts is then offered him, he summons his daughter and her mother, and the fourouboloma tigi again explains the reason for his /201/ coming. Everything is settled with the following words: "Give my greetings to the one who sent you and all his family, tell him that I am happy he is asking for my daughter. A diara an ye hali (1), it is a great joy for us, but this, you know, needs reflection! I

1. A, "that"; diara, "is happy";
an ye, "for us"; hali, "much."

will speak to my friends soon, and in a few days you will know my decision." The emissary has not been refused and, satisfied with himself and the good prospects of the matter, he leaves to carry to the suitor the words of the girl's father, which should open the door of hope to his heart.

2. The Diviners and Fetishes Accept or Reject the Suitor

584 To marry their daughter and marry her well is a nightmare to
593 every father and mother, and both remain anxious when a suitor presents himself. The Bambara know anguish! A daughter may not be beautiful; often she is even ugly, with a large navel, an umbilical hernia, or blood blister due to the clumsiness of the midwife, but her father lives in her large, white eyes marked with a black spot that is full of life and shining, in her broadly slit mouth and puffy lips; he recognizes his own, and his whole inner being cries to him: "This is your daughter, this is your blood."

Frightful thoughts come to torment him: "If the suitor should have the character of a villain and the brutality of a beast, will he not beat my child mercilessly? Might he have one of those shameful diseases that people hide and do not name, so that my daughter will commit adultery in order to avoid the embarrassment of being